



Headlines

A Bimonthly
Indiana NRCS Newsletter

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Issue 49

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Heart to Heart with Hardisty

It's hard to believe it's already the middle of our fiscal year. However, the second half has some positive changes for us.



We are still waiting to hear from National Headquarters about our final budget allocations. This setback has not stopped us from operating and filling positions within our means. While we are still unsure what fiscal year 2014 holds for us financially, we should continue our conservation planning efforts and help propel Indiana to one of the top conservation states within the agency.



Jane Hardisty
State Conservationist



The 2014 Farm Bill roll out is currently in process; however we are still waiting on the rules and regulations to be written. While we wait for the rules and regulations to be finalized, we are encouraging our field staff to continue taking program applications and getting familiar with the updated Toolkit 7.



Every year, producers, agricultural associations, corporations, universities, governmental agencies and countless others across America join together to recognize the contributions of agriculture during National Ag Day. This year, National Ag Day is being held on Tuesday, March 25th and falls during National Ag Week (March 23-29). We, in Indiana, have so much to celebrate and are proud of the commitment of our employees and our landowners in taking steps to make our soil healthier.



It may not seem like it after this winter, but springtime is just around the corner! Get geared up to hit the fields and work with our producers and landowners in getting conservation on the ground! Let's continue to make fiscal year 2014 one of Indiana NRCS' best!

Jane E. Hardisty

***** Employee Spotlight *****

Cassandra Vondran, Huntington County District Conservationist

Q: As the one of the newest NRCS employees, please help us get to know you better. Tell us a little bit about yourself.

I was raised on a small farm in Allen County, Indiana. I attended Manchester College where I received my Bachelor's degree in Biology.

Q: How did you become interested in conservation?

I was always interested in the outdoors and nature. Being raised on a farm, I loved to be outside, and I spent lots of time exploring our woods and creeks. I became increasingly interested in conservation while I attended Manchester.

Q: I understand you worked for IDNR before coming to NRCS. What was your role there and how did your past work experience prepare you for your current position as a District Conservationist?

I worked for the Division of Soil Conservation (originally with IDNR and then with ISDA) for nearly 18 years. While with the division, I worked in Allen, DeKalb, Lake, Porter and Steuben counties. I was also a team leader for ISDA out of the Huntington Tech Team office for three years. Most recently I was the resource specialist in Allen and DeKalb counties. While I was with ISDA and IDNR, I gained a lot of experience in conservation planning, utilizing Toolkit and Protracts, and survey and design which gave me a good foundation for my work as a DC.

Q: What are you looking forward to most in your position?

I am looking forward to working with landowners and producers in Huntington County and helping them to make their operations more profitable while keeping conservation in focus.

Q: Do you have any professional or personal goals for 2014?

For 2014, I would like to spend more time with family and friends.

Q: Do you have any hobbies or special interests that you can tell us about?

I love to spend time with my family. My husband and I along with our son have a small hobby farm. We have horses, goats, chickens, dogs and cats and we love to go horseback riding.



Cassandra Vondran, Huntington County District Conservationist

Hoosier Happenings

KUDOS TO:

Bill Lambert, Area Easement Program Specialist and **Brian Musser, District Conservationist**, for their efforts in the Northeast Area site tours. They were both awesome to work with and each went out of their way to assist and explain things. Their patience and helpfulness made the trip worthwhile and provided me with a greater understand of how the HFRP and GRP process works.—**Carey Lindgren, Easement Programs Specialist**

Chad Schotter, Agricultural Engineer and **Andrew Pursifell, Agricultural Engineer** for earning their Professional Engineer license.—**Kimberly Neumann, Northeast Area Conservationist**

Jennifer Chen, Resource Conservationist, for her diligence at documenting necessary procedures and fixes for Toolkit, and her willingness to share great documentation with others who are floundering or are just new to Toolkit Support functions. She is a joy to work with and I thank God for her collaborative spirit.—**Reed Sims, Vermont State GIS Specialist**

Tony Bailey, Conservation Agronomist, for arranging a successful session to share information and projects between NRCS and USGS.—**Jill Reinhart, ASTC Special Projects**

Becky Fletcher, State Public Affairs Specialist and **Susan Meadows, Natural Resource Specialist**, for coordinating the Soil Health Forums Feb. 18 with 400 Indiana participants—**Jill Reinhart, ASTC Special Projects**

Daniel Phillips, Cartographic Technician and **Kevin Norwood, Soil Survey Office Leader** for their efforts in organizing a successful Black History Month celebration. —**Jane Hardisty, State Conservationist**

Tandy Easler, Engineering Technician for her great work on assisting in the installation of conservation projects. She really does a good job and is very thorough.—**Fred Knott, Contractor from Laotto, IN**

Tony Branam, District Conservationist, for his help with implementing conservation practices on our ground and with a CRP issue we had on some of our land.—**Rick Brown, co-owner of AppleWorks orchard in Trafalgar, IN**

Jane Hardisty for being named the official “Deanette” of State Conservationists. She is the State Conservationist with the longest term in the country (NOT the oldest!) - **Chief Weller**

FARM BILL RECOGNIZES VETERANS

A new revision in the 2014 Farm Bill recognizes Veterans as a historically underserved audience, now eligible for special emphasis group funding. Veterans may be eligible for an increased payment rate and receive advance payment of up to 50 percent to purchase materials and services needed to implement conservation practices included in their EQIP contract.

As many of our veterans come home they are moving out into rural areas and beginning to practice agriculture disproportionately higher than those who are staying in the city. This is particularly interesting to our veterans because there have been direct links to the stress relief and focus that farming and agriculture provide for our veterans. The stress relief and focus have helped many of our veterans cope with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

The attached webpages have been developed by the Farmer Veteran Coalition and have a great deal of information and insight as to what may be included in the new Farm Bill.

<http://visitor.benchmarkemail.com/c/v?e=31A3DF&c=36432&l=466E1DA&email=k8hTxw0lQdQcxts%2F0k3VfkLLOuYpvf%2FS&relid=266BCD6C>

http://www.farmvetco.org/archives/2872?utm_source=BenchmarkEmail&utm_campaign=FVC%20newsletter%20Feb%202014&utm_medium=email

For more information, contact Evan Smith, Veteran’s Special Emphasis Program Manager at: evan.smith@in.usda.gov



Indiana NRCS Veterans receive certificates of service during a Veteran's Day luncheon. Left to Right: Jeff Cannaday, Dario Lee, Beth Clarizia, Tony Branam, Gary Warring, Tiffany Davidson, Stephen Ball, Gail Voiles, Evan Smith, Jane Hardisty (State Conservationist), and Mark Cambron. NOT PICTURED: Celesta Dunston, Chris Lee, Jayson Mas, Joe Pearman, Roger Williams, Ryan Leazenby, Susan Grivas, Chuck Vansickle.

Hoosier Happenings (cont.)

SPECIAL EMPHASIS: BLACK HISTORY MONTH

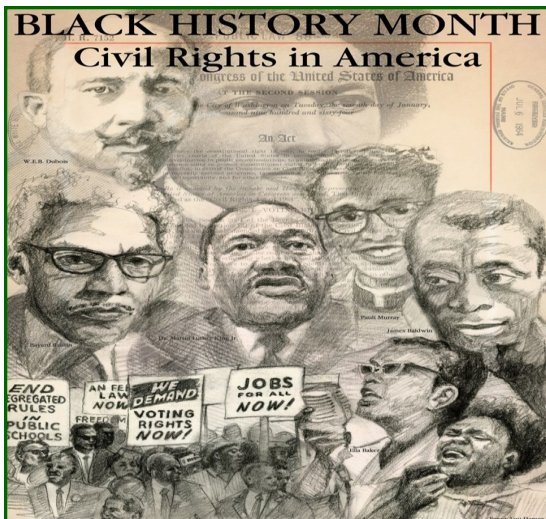
Submitted by Daniel Phillips, SEPM—Black Emphasis Program

The Association for the Study of African American Life and History selected the theme “Civil Rights in America” to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. Daniel Phillips, Special Emphasis Program Manager invited all Indiana NRCS employees and partners to participate in exploring the history of equal rights for all.

This February, we paid special tribute to the heroes, sung and unsung, at the heart of this journey—from engineers of the Underground Railroad to the educators who answered a free people’s call for free mind, from patriots who proved that valor knows no color to activist who marched out Union toward a brighter day.

On February 14, 2014, the Indiana NRCS state office showed a documentary commemorating the 50th anniversary of Martin Luther King's March on Washington. This program tells the story of how the march began from the people who organized and participated in it. The program was followed by a luncheon.

NRCS employees are a very diverse group. It is diversity that in some respect is our strength. It is important for all of us to learn about the heritage and culture of the people we work with daily. Through understanding the differences in each culture, we can work together to improve service to our customers and employees.



NEW WEBSITE AVAILABLE FOR LANDOWNERS

A new website has been launched by NRCS National Headquarters to help landowners understand the process when working with an NRCS Office.

“Getting Started with NRCS” 5 Step feature has been added to the national website and you will find this extremely helpful, especially when working with new customers. This website takes landowners through the five step process of working with NRCS—Planning, Application, Eligibility, Ranking and Implementing. Fact sheets that feature this information are in development at national headquarters.

Visit the “Getting Started with NRCS” webpage here:

<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detailfull/national/home/?cid=stelpdb1193811>

COMBINED FEDERAL CAMPAIGN UPDATE

Submitted by Kathy Judd, CFC Coordinator

In Fiscal Year 2013, Indiana NRCS employees generously gave a grand total of \$15,125 to various charities through the Combined Federal Campaign. That is \$3,989 more than last year!

Thank You all once again for making the choice to support your favorite charities through the CFC. You all are just amazing!

Partnership Links

IN Association of Soil & Water Conservation Districts, Bi-Weekly

Updates: www.iaswcd.org/whatsnew/index.html

IN Conservation Partnership: <http://icp.iaswcd.org>

IN Dept. of Environmental Management: www.in.gov/idem

IN Dept. of Natural Resources: www.in.gov/dnr

IN State Dept. of Agriculture, Division of Soil Conservation:

<http://www.in.gov/isda/soil/>

Purdue University: www.purdue.edu

USDA Farm Service Agency: www.fsa.usda.gov

Hoosier Happenings (cont.)

VOLUNTEER HELPS EDUCATE ABOUT SOIL HEALTH

Shelby Richardson has been instrumental in creating soils monoliths featuring the positive effects of cover crops on improving soil health. By assisting Dena Marshall, resource soil scientist for the Southeast Area of Indiana, collect and process thirty-two soil core samples, Shelby was able to work with nearly twenty-five producers in nine different counties and provide them educational tools that will last for many years. The soil core samples were taken to show producers the depths of which their cover crop roots were penetrating, enhancing the soil's health, productivity and by creating avenues for later crops to utilize in search of water and nutrients. These soil cores were then preserved to be used as benchmark for later studies and comparison of the soil profiles as the soil health initiative continues.



Shelby Richardson stands with her completed soil monoliths

Soil monoliths were created from the three inch soil cores collected on cooperators fields. The soil cores were placed into PVC trays, meticulously “picked” to reveal roots, rooting channels and depths, earthworm channels, and over all physical properties of the soil profile. Once completed the soil monoliths were saturated with a mixture of Elmer’s white glue and water to adhere the soil to the PVC trays and to itself. Shelby spent over 100 hours perfecting her methods to create these beautiful tools of education. Shelby conducted her work at the picnic table in the backyard of the NRCS office throughout the summer months of 2013. These monoliths are very durable and can be used for many years at field days, fairs, and school educational events to help the public learn more about soil health and the advantages of cover crops.

Data was also collected at the sampling sites documenting pertinent information on the soil cores such as producer’s information, type of cover crop, type of soil, method of seeding, years in the cover cropping system, types of crop the cover was following, rooting depths of cover crop and of commodity crop, and depths of earthworm activity. Shelby collected and organized all of this information into a spreadsheet so data can be used in later samplings to document trends and improvements in the soil’s health.

By creating these tools producers, Soil and Water Conservation District staff, media, and NRCS staff have gained a greater appreciation for the potential of bettering our soil health through the no-till and cover cropping systems. Shelby’s willingness to volunteer her time in order to learn more about soils and the agency has made this into an opportunity to influence many people for years to come. Her interest and hardworking attitude has been recognized by many USDA employees in the office. This has encouraged many of them to consider approaching others who may be interested volunteering their expertise and time to benefit our natural resources.



2014 FARM BILL INFORMATION ROLL OUT

We have received approval to begin promoting the new 2014 Agricultural Act.

The Programs staff is developing detailed guidance about how to proceed with sign ups and other activities and that will be coming out soon.

As of today, the NRCS talking points are still in clearance at USDA so this means we cannot do any media interviews, news releases or newsletter articles. Once those have been cleared we will review them and make any changes specifically for Indiana and get those out to you. In the meantime, if media contact you, please refer them to Becky Fletcher, State Public Affairs Specialist.

The Indiana Farm Bill webpage has been launched and mirrors the national website. As Programs and Technology staff have changes and updates these will be added to the site.

The Farm Bill Communications Toolkit is located on the Indiana SharePoint under the Public Affairs Tab and includes the following:

- Sample Graphics – use these in news releases, newsletters, publications, etc.
- Print-on-demand national fact sheets
- Audience-specific communications plans for outreach
- “Your Guide to the New Farm Bill” Graphic
- Sample social media posts

Items that are coming in the near future:

- Power point presentation
- Indiana Farm Bill Talking Points
- News Release example
- Conservation in Your community columns
- Indiana fact sheets for each program

If you have any questions about promotional materials for the new Farm Bill, please contact Becky Fletcher, State Public Affairs Specialist at: rebecca.fletcher@in.usda.gov or Kris Vance, Public Affairs Specialist at: kris.vance@in.usda.gov.

PERSONNEL UPDATE

SELECTIONS FROM VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENTS

Lisa Bolton selected for the Executive Assistant position on the STC Staff effective 2-23-14

Rafael Vega selected for the Area Easement Program Specialist at the SE Area Office effective 3-9-14

REASSIGNMENTS

Christopher Smith, Engineering Technician, reassigned to NRCS in La Junta, CO effective 1-26-14

Albert Cleaver, Field Operations Assistant, transferred to Department of Veteran's Affairs effective 2-23-14

Lindsay Martinez, Soil Conservationist, reassigned to the Versailles Field Office effective 3-9-14

Vince Pitstick, Soil Conservationist, reassigned to the Greensburg Field Office effective 3-9-14

RETIREMENTS

Dan Fleming, District Conservationist, at the Rensselaer Field Office effective 12-31-13

Historical Photo of the Issue



As the Public Affairs staff continues to sort through filing cabinets of old photos to archive, we thought it would be fun to share some of our favorites and the descriptions that were included with each photo.

DATE: July, 1947

LOCATION: Tippecanoe County, Indiana

TITLE: Farm Pond

DESCRIPTION: Farm pond was constructed to stop a gully cutting back into cropland, to provide fresh water, primarily for hogs, to provide fish and recreations and to beautify the farm.

Mark Your Calendar

MARCH

- 18: Managing For Excellence Training
Area Conservationist Meeting
- 19: Leadership Team Meeting
- 25: Northwest Area Meeting
- 26: Southwest Area Meeting
- 28: IFEC Meeting

APRIL

- 1: Northeast Area Meeting
- 8: SAC/FAC Meeting
- 9: Southeast Area Meeting
- 16: IFEC Meeting
- 22: ICP Leaders Meeting
- 23: Leadership Team Meeting
- 28—May 2: Northeast Area Review
- 29: Northwest Area Meeting
- 30: Southwest Area Meeting



You can find up-to-date information about upcoming events on the Indiana SharePoint site at:
<https://nrcs.sc.egov.usda.gov/central/in/Lists/Calendar/calendar.aspx>